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S E R M O N,

PREACH'D AT

T I V E R T O N,

December the 23. 1725.

A N D

Publisch'd at the Request of several of the Hearers.

By SAMUEL WESTCOTT.



E X O N:

Printed by ANDREW BEECH, for SAMUEL DYER, Bookseller in Tiverton.
MDCCXXVI. 4 d.

ST. JOHN

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THE
P R E F A C E.



HIS SERMON was preach'd at our common Weekly Lecture, and is now made publick at the Request of the Auditors. It was compos'd without any Design of sending it to the Press: But having Hopes that it may tend to satisfy the Doubts of some sincere Christians, and promote Piety, and Devotedness to the Service of GOD, among those that are Young, I have consented to the publishing it.

The PREFACE.

These, I can appeal to GOD, are the Ends which I have in View: Which if they are, by the Blessing of GOD, answer'd, or in any Measure obtain'd, I desire to ascribe all the Glory and Praise to Him.

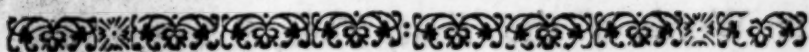
Samuel Westcott.





A

SERMON, &c.



I CHRON. xxviii. 9.

AND thou, Solomon, my Son, know thou the God of thy Father, and serve him with a perfect Heart, and with a willing Mind: For the Lord searcheth all Hearts, and understandeth all the Imaginations of the Thoughts. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.



THESE Words contain David's Dying Charge to his Son, who was to succeed him in the Throne, and was appointed to build the Temple of the Lord. In this Chapter we read, that David assembles

bles all the Princes of *Israel*, and declares to them, that the Crown was intail'd by God upon his Son *Solomon*, and that he was to build the House of the Lord. He, having serv'd his Generation according to the Will of God, finding that Death was approaching, leaves a very affecting Exhortation with his People to make Religion their Business; as at the 8th Verse. Especially he in a very pathetic manner addresses himself to his Son in the Words of the Text, *Thou, Solomon, my Son, &c.*

In speaking to the Words I shall do these Three Things :

I. Consider what this Charge implys and carries in it, *Know thou the God of thy Father.*

II. How we must serve God, in order to be accepted of him; or the Qualifications of that Service and Obedience which God demands.

III. I will give the Reasons, shewing the Necessity of our thus serving God.

IV. And

IV. And lastly conclude with some practical Inferences.

I. What is imply'd in this Charge, *Know thou the God of thy Father*. 'Tis not to be question'd but that *David* had instructed his Son in the Knowledge of the True God and his Law; he had given him a Religious Education. What then is signified by these Words? And I apprehend they imply the following Things: 1. That he should labour to grow in the Knowledge of God. 2. That he should cultivate Acquaintance with God. 3. That he should acknowledge none but the True God of *Israel* as the Object of his Worship. 4. That he should reflect upon the Mercies of God to him, whereby he had abundantly answer'd that Title of being a God to him.

1. Hereby he enjoins him to grow in the Knowledge of God. *Hosea vi. 3. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.* Those who use their best Endeavours, such as earnest and humble Prayer and humble Inquiry, shall know so much of God and his Will as is necessary to their Happiness. *If thou criest after Knowledge, and liftest up thy Voice*

Voice for Understanding; if thou seekest her as Silver, and searchest for her as for hid Treasures, then, upon using such Endeavours, Promise runs, thou shalt understand the Fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God, Prov. ii. 3, 4, 5. Thus the Apostle prays for the Colossians, that they might encrease in the Knowledge of God. But,

2. *Know God*; that is, Cultivate and maintain Acquaintance with him. Rest not in a speculative Knowledge, but *know* him so as to *love* him above all, to fear offending him. Know what God is in himself, what he is to his People. He is all-sufficient for his own and all his Creatures Happiness: He is the Chief Good, a Being of infinite Perfections. *Know God*, and endeavour to resemble him in all his moral Perfections of Holiness, Justice, Truth. 'Tis in a Conformity to him, as to these his imitable Perfections, that the Dignity of the Human Nature does consist. Know God so as to walk in constant Communion with him, and as one under his Eye; don't alienate or estrange thyself from him. There is no Joy in the World comparable with that which the holy Soul has who thus knows, and acquaints himself with God.

'Twas

'Twas excellent Advice which *Eliphaz* gave *Job*, in Chap. xxii. of that Book, Ver. 21.

3. He may be understood as recommending to him the God of *Israel* as the only Object of Religious Worship: Know God, and acknowledge no other but him. Let that God whom I have made the only Object of my Worship and Service be in the same manner acknowledg'd and serv'd by thee. This he might hint to him as a Preservative from Idolatry; for in vain do any profess to *know* God, if they do not *glorify him as God*. The Apostle takes Notice of the Folly of the Gentile World in this respect, *Romans* i. 21, 22, 23. He had been saying before, that the Works of Creation did afford such a clear Discovery of the Being of God, that the Heathens were without Excuse that they did not make the Great Creator the only Object of their Worship; but, when they *knew* God, or might have *known* him, had they attended to the Demonstration of his Being from the Works of Creation, yet they glorify'd him not *as God*, but fell into the Worship of many False Deities. Now, considering how prone the *Jews* were to Idolatry, which *David* very well knew, I cannot think but that he in-

tends this in his Charge. But here is one Thing more imply'd in this Expression, and that is,

4. That he should reflect upon the Mercy of God towards him, whereby he had every Way answer'd that Title of being a God to him. *Know the God of thy Father*: Call to Mind the many remarkable Providences in my Favour, how he hath honour'd me by advancing me to the Kingdom: Consider in how many Difficulties God hath preserved me, and, which is the greatest Happiness, hath taken me into Covenant with himself, which he expresses was *all his Salvation*, and *all his Desire*, II. Sam. xxiii. 5. Know thou this my God, who hath been so good and gracious to me, who hath honour'd me by taking me into Covenant with himself and into which thou hast been enter'd: Know and serve thy God, thy Father's God.

II. I now proceed to the *second Thing*, to shew the Qualifications of that Service which God requires. 'Tis of the last Importance that we regard the Manner how we serve God. 'Tis the Desire of every sincere Person to be approved of the Lord. *David* therefore mentions

tions these Qualifications of Obedience, which would not fail of rendering it acceptable. *Serve him with a perfect Heart and a willing Mind.* Here let me consider what we are to understand by *a perfect Heart.*

1. Hereby is meant a Heart devoid of all allowed Guile and Hypocrisy. Sincerity is accepted instead of Perfection. Tho' we shall not be able, while in this Life, to serve God without any Flaws or Defects, yet we may choose whether we will propose right or false Ends to ourselves in Religion. For Instance: He who chiefly eyes the approving himself to his Fellow-Creatures, the gaining their Esteem and Applause, or the Advancement of a secular Interest, can never be said to serve God with a *perfect Heart*; for 'tis not the least of his Care whether God be pleas'd with what he does or no. But, on the other hand, he is sincere, and in a Scripture Sense *perfect*, who in his obeying the Will of God, principally regards *him*, and whose Desire and Endeavour 'tis to approve himself to God; who aims at the Promotion of God's Glory, and of his own Eternal Welfare and Happiness. If a Profession of Religion be taken up, and main-

tain'd, only out of Custom, because 'tis scandalous to do otherwise, or for the accomplishing some worldly carnal Ends in View; this is not serving God with a *perfect Heart*. To outward Appearance, who were more zealous than the *Pharisees*; but however specious and pompous their Devotion was to the Eye of the World, their Hearts were full of Covetousness, Ambition, and Hypocrisy; for they did all to be *seen of Men*, as Christ, the Searcher of Hearts, tells 'em; and for this Reason he compares 'em to *Sepulchres, fair without, but within full of Rottenness*. These low base Ends spoil'd their Duties, and render'd 'em nauseous to God. Here, by the Way, I would observe, for the satisfying the Scruples of some sincere Persons, That the proposing to ourselves the Hopes of the Reward promised in another Life is no Argument that they want this perfect Heart. Some are apt to doubt whether they are sincere, because they find themselves influenced by the Hope of the Reward promis'd. This they fear is a mercenary Principle, and an Evidence of Hypocrisy. But in Answer, *God is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him, Heb. xi. 6*. And he hath propounded in his Word Eternal Life and Blessedness;

ness; and therefore we cannot do amiss in regarding it. Certainly your God, who hath promised eternal Rewards to his faithful Servants, design'd that these should sway and influence them with glorious Hopes of obtaining 'em. To serve God therefore in Hope of future Bliss is such a Service as he requires, and will graciously accept; for he hath in infinite Mercy annex'd the great Reward in a future Life, to counterballance all the Difficulties we might meet with in the Course of our Duty. Let us therefore eye the Crown of Glory, meditate upon the Glories treasured up for the faithful Servants of God, that we may be inspir'd with earnest Desires and Endeavours of attaining them, that we may be zealous, constant, and persevering, in the Service of our most gracious and bountiful Lord.

Indeed, there are some Cases, into which the People of God may be brought, in which, without a Prospect of Happiness in a future Life, 'tis hard to tell what should determine 'em for the Service of God; as in the Case of *Moses*. He refus'd the Honours of *Pharoah's* Court, *choosing rather to suffer Affliction with the People of God than to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season*; and we are told he had an
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Eye, in this his Choice, *to the Recompence of Reward*, Heb. xi. 24, 25, 26. 'Twas in Hope of the Promise that the Twelve Tribes instantly *served God Day and Night*, Acts xxvi. 6, 7. Let no sincere Soul therefore doubt on this Account, but encourage himself with the Hope of Eternal Life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised. This is such Self-seeking which is very consistent with a *perfect Heart*. But they who, while they pretend to serve God, do mainly regard the advancing a temporal Interest, are destitute of Sincerity; for such will continue their Profession no longer than they can obtain their wicked Ends by the Service of God. While this befriends their carnal Designs, they are all of the Side of Religion; but when the Service of God clashes with the Interest of the Flesh, they soon shew what it was they chiefly regarded. But,

2. *Serve God with a perfect Heart*; that is, constantly and universally. Don't dispense with any of his sacred Precepts. We are not left at Liberty to choose what Command we will observe, which we will not: The Command of God must awe us into an universal Obedience. No Change of Times, Conditions, or Relations, can justify a Breach or Violation

lation of any one of God's Precepts. He cannot be said thus to *serve God* who divides his Heart and Time, sometimes seems very devout, 'till a Temptation offers, and then the Man is overcome, and becomes a Servant of Sin. You have a remarkable Instance in *Amaziah*, II. Kings, xiv. 3. where we read he *did that which was right in the Sight of the Lord, yet not like David his Father*. He did that which was in some respects acceptable to God; but it was but for a Time; for he afterwards fell into Idolatry: And therefore he is said to *do what was right in the Sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect Heart*; see II. Chron. xxv. 2. If we would thus serve God, we must adhere to him and his Precepts amidst all Temptations to Apostacy. 'Tis not sufficient to *begin well*, but we must *persevere*. *Be thou faithful to the Death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life*, Rev. ii. 10. We must serve him with a Principle of Faith, Sincerity, and Resolution, and that to the End of our Days. All the Powers of our Souls, and the Members of our Bodies, must be imploy'd in his Service. But here we are not to think that God requires us to be so wholly devoted to his Service, as never to think, act, or do, any
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Thing else. Tho' we must never commit a known wilful Sin, or omit any Duty, yet God hath made it our Duty, whilst in this World, to mind the Affairs of this Life also, which will necessarily call for Time and Thought. But this must be always in Subordination to higher and infinitely better Things. This it's plain, a Person may do, and yet serve God with a perfect Heart; for *David* here charges his Son thus to do. Tho' he was to be advanced to the Kingdom, which high Station would necessarily call for much Thought and Time, (which shews that the Heart may be true for God and Duty, tho' there may be many Avocations) our chief Care must be this, that, whilst we mingle with the Things of this Life, we don't grow into an Alienation from the Divine Life, or neglect any Part of our Duty to God. But,

3. God must be serv'd not only with a *perfect Heart* but with a *willing Mind*, with *Chearfulness*, with a Soul inflam'd and inspir'd with the Love of God. This inward Principle will make all the Commandments easy and pleasant. When *St. John* tells us, that God's *Commandments are not grievous*, I. *Joh. v. 3.* he manifestly speaks of such as are born again,
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and whose Souls are touch'd with this sacred Fire of Love to God. This is the Fountain of Delight, when the natural Aversion of our Minds to the pure and holy Laws of God is conquer'd and subdued. When, by his Grace and Power, we are made willing, how pleasantly do we walk in the Ways of his Precepts, and do his Will, in some measure as 'tis done by the glorious Angels, who wait God's Commands, and execute them with the utmost Alacrity. This Affection is the Parent of an hearty and universal Obedience. He that loves God above all will be careful to do what he knows is acceptable to him, and cautiously avoid what he has Reason to think will expose him to the Divine Displeasure. If the Love of God reigns in the Heart, your serving him will be but following the Bent of your Souls; and certainly 'tis not ungrateful to be employ'd as we would and desire to be. Such do not obey the Will of God from a Principle of slavish Fear, which produces only a partial and forc'd Obedience, but with the sanctified Affections of Love, Joy, and filial Fear, which make them use the quickest Dispatch in the Service of God: *I will run the Ways of thy Commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my*
C *Heart,*

Heart, Psa. cxix. 32. Thus I have endeavour'd to explain the Qualifications of that Obedience, which will not fail of procuring Acceptance with God. I proceed to the Third Thing,

III. To shew the Reasons why God must be thus serv'd. And here I shall chiefly insist on those Two Reasons *David* offers in the Words: 1. Because God searcheth all Hearts: 2. If we thus seek and serve him, he will be found of us; if we do not, it will be infinitely to our Prejudice and Disadvantage.

1. God is the Searcher of all Hearts: He is perfectly acquainted with the Principles upon which we act: He disregards all Services, however specious they look to the Eye of the World, if the Heart be wanting. His Laws reach to the very Intentions of our Spirits, and enjoin the strictest Purity of Heart and Life. He knows all the Imaginations of our Thoughts, and cannot be impos'd upon or deceiv'd by any external Shews of Devotion. If there be any allowed Guile and Hypocrisy within, it may be skreen'd from our fellow Mortals, but not from his all-searching Eyes. This is the Reason *David* here assigns; and 'tis a most powerful one, if it be duly thought on.

on. A becoming Apprehension of God's Omniscience would prevent many Excursions of our Thoughts in his Service, and make us attend to this One Thing, *viz.* the approving ourselves to him: It would shew us the Folly and Danger of carrying on a Profession of Religion from Worldly Views. If we engage in the Service of God, either we desire and design to approve ourselves to and please him, or we do not. If we design the former, 'tis absolutely necessary that we regard the Frame of our Souls: For nothing but Truth in the inward Parts can recommend us to his Favour. Human Government can only prescribe Rules for our outward Actions; and it would be a vain Thing for one Man to pretend to punish another for sinful Thoughts: For 'tis God's Prerogative alone to *search the Heart*, Jer. xvii. 10.

2. For your Encouragement, if you thus *seek and serve* him, *he will be found of you*, Psa. cxix. 2. What he here recommends to his Son, he had practised himself, as at the 10th Verse, *With my whole Heart have I sought thee*; and he could testify from his own Experience that *God was found of him*. He sought God in his Ordinances, and had Experience of

his Presence: So that these were endear'd to him as the appointed Means of Conversing with God. For which Reason, when he was banish'd from the Temple, he expresses his longing Desire of appearing before God, *Psa. xlii. 1, 2.* And when he could not make his Personal Appearance in the House of God, yet his Soul follows hard after him; and he found that God's *Right Hand upheld him*, *Psa. lxiii. 8.* Upholding supporting Grace God never denies to his Servants that seek it. The Promise is, *They that seek me early shall find me*, *Prov. viii. 17.* Thus *David* assures his Son, that God would *be found of him, and establish his Throne*, so long as he should continue adhering to him. Then, by Way of Terror, he lets him know, If he should forsake God, and degenerate to the Worship of Idols, he would cast him off for ever. Thus *Azariah* tells King *Asa*, *II Chron. xv. 2.* *The Lord is with you, while ye be with him, but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.* *Solomon* might imagine that God's Promise of establishing the Throne in his Father's Family might secure him from all Danger; but he carefully obviates such a Construction, telling him that the Promise was conditional, *if thou forsakest him, he will re*
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ject thee. Think not, therefore, that when I am dead and gone, thou mayest live as thou pleatest, as being no longer under my Restraints. If thou slight or prophane the Service of God, and castest off his Fear, he also will abandon thee. And this God himself assures *Solomon*, when upon the Throne, in *II. Chron. vii. 17.* to the End: Where he promises to perpetuate the Kingdom to him, if he persever'd in his Duty, and imitated the Example of his Father *David*; he sets before him a Curse as well as a Blessing; he threatens him, if he should turn away from and forsake his Statutes, should go and serve other Gods, that he would destroy both Church and State; he would *pluck them up by the Roots*, and the House that was built for his Name he would utterly demolish; so that it should be a Proverb, and a By-Word among the Nations; so that if any should ask, Why hath God brought all this Evil upon them? the Answer should be, *Because they forsook the Lord God of their Fathers, laid hold on other Gods, and worshipped them.* These are the Arguments which he makes use of to fix his Son in the Service of God: To which I would subjoin Two or Three Arguments more, shewing the Necessity

ty of serving God with a perfect Heart, and as the Command of God. *Walk before me, and be thou perfect*, Gen. xvii. 1. *Jos. xxiv. 14.* So in the New Testament we are enjoin'd to *be fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord*, Rom. xii. 11. Then you have the best Examples worthy your Imitation. This was *Joshua's* Resolution, *As for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.* Thus *St. Paul* serv'd God *with all Humility of Mind*; and he could appeal to him, *God is my Witness, whom I serve with my Spirit.* And then you have the Promise of an eternal Recompence of Reward which God hath, in infinite Mercy, propos'd to encourage us with the Prospect of, to make us constant and persevering in his Service.

Thus I have spoken to the Three Things I propos'd. All that remains now is to gather somewhat by Way of Inference from what has been said.

First, Hence I infer, that the Knowledge of God is the Foundation of all Religion. Ignorance is the Mother of Superstition and fiery Zeal; but the Knowledge of God, and of his Nature as Spiritual, is the Parent of a reasonable and spiritual Service. Here we see what should be the great Care of Parents, namely
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to instruct their Children betimes in the Knowledge of God, and of the Principles of Religion. They are cruel Parents, whatever Love they may pretend, who only out of Custom, and as a Matter of Ceremony, dedicate their Children to God in Infancy, and take no Care of them afterwards, when they come to the Use of Reason, and are capable of Instruction. How may we suppose such Children as are lost and destroy'd for Lack of Knowledge, will in the most obdaining manner charge their Misery upon their negligent Parents?

Secondly, Hence we may gather how dreadful the Misery of such will be who have had a Religious Education, and been frequently instructed, warned, and directed, and yet slight and contemn all. Those Parents who have any Concern for the eternal Welfare of their Children, will not fail of using all proper Means to promote it. They will seek God for 'em frequently, that his Grace may take the Possession of their Hearts. And 'tis observable that *David* not only charges his Son to serve God with a perfect Heart, but he makes this the Matter of his Petition to God for him, *I. Chron. xxix. 19.* And if, after all
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their best Endeavours, such find their Children unhappily engaged in a Course of Sin and Death, none can conceive what Grief this gives to such as are solicitously concern'd for the Happiness of those that proceed from their own Bowels. However, this may tend not a little to ease their Minds, if they have not been wanting in their Care and Endeavours, the Blood and Damnation of their Children cannot be charg'd upon them. But of all others, the Misery of such as perish wilfully for slighting such wise Instructious, so many repeated Warnings will be most dreadful. If such forsake God, they will be cast off for ever from him, and they will be able to charge their Destruction upon none but upon themselves. For, if it be a very considerable Blessing to descend from pious Parents, as all who have any Concern for their Souls will acknowledge, and bless God for, it must be a proportionable Addition to the Guilt of Sin to run counter to such Counsels, and reject all Reproofs, and Warnings of the dangerous Consequences of Sin.

Thirdly, Hence we may gather the Necessity and Advantages of an early Piety. If ever it be necessary at all to engage in the Ways of Godliness,

Godliness, why not in Youth? For don't we see daily how many are cut off by Death in the Morning of their Age? 'Tis observable; that when *David* gave this Charge to his Son, he was Young and Tender, as it follows in the 1st Verse of the next Chapter. Besides, how acceptable is this to God, when such make choice of him as the Guide of their Youth, when they choose his Testimonies, as the Rule of their Actions; *Ecclesi. xii. 1. Jerem. xxii. 2.* In this Age, you have such Advantages for Holiness, as you will never have more, for now the Mind is flexible, and more likely to receive Divine Impressions. When Habits of Sin and Vice are confirm'd by repeated Acts, 'tis with very great Difficulty they are conquer'd. The Motives to Religion are the same; but will have more or less Effect according to your Prepossession in favour of your Lusts. Now, 'tis certain that the Prepossession is nothing so strong in Youth as 'tis in advanc'd Age. If you are willing now to commence the Servants of the most high God, you will be much more hereafter. If you own 'tis necessary one Time or other before Death, that you devote yourselves to the Practice of Religion, certainly the Present Time hath such Advantages, as the Future

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cannot

cannot have: For you sin against present Convictions, and so contract such a Hardness of Heart, and such a Love of Sin, as we very rarely find to be conquer'd and rooted out in Age.

Besides, you owe your best Strength to God who gave you your Being, and is your continual Preserver and Benefactor. Moreover, consider with what Serenity of Mind you will be able to reflect upon your past Lives, when you come to Old Age, and in View of Death. What Satisfaction and Comfort will this afford you, to consider how early you devoted yourselves to God and his Fear; how by your Resolution aided by his Grace, you subdu'd impetuous Lusts and Passions, which occasion'd the Destruction of so many Thousands. So that they who set out betimes in the Way of Holiness, do hereby secure their main Interest. If they die in Youth, they die in the Favour of God; if they live to Old Age, they are not fill'd with melancholy Reflections upon a considerable Part of a mispent Life, which they must be who make a wretched Choice in that Age. Such, in Comparison with others, that have unhappily engag'd in Courses of Sin, may be said to need no Repentance; that is, they need not alter the Course of their Lives. And add also, This
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is the most effectual Course to attain Assurance of the Love of God, and of your eternal Salvation. 'Tis the Foundation of a comfortable Life, and in View of Death will fill your Souls with joyful Prospects, and disarm it of its Sting. If you can appeal to God as *Hezekiah*, when he was told by the Prophet he should die and not live, *II. Kings xx. 3. I beseech thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in Truth, and with a perfect Heart.*

Lastly, By what hath been said, every Person may form a Judgment; whether he be approved of God or no. To know this, (which one would think should be the most anxious Inquiry of every Soul) you had need only examine yourselves, whether in your serving God you have been influenced by his All-seeing Eye, whether you have made it your chief Care to please him. Have I worshipped God with that Purity of Heart, that Perfection, or Sincerity of Intention, which he requires? Or have I been govern'd by sinister Views? Every Person, upon impartial Examination, may estimate by this what will be his Sentence another Day. This may justly be Matter of Terror to all Hypocrites, who deal deceitfully

with God, who *honour him with their Lips*, while *their Hearts are far from him*; who make Religion a Cloak for their secret Iniquities. The Time draws on, such must have all their latent base Ends expos'd and laid open: Such, as our Lord expresses it, *shall receive the greater Damnation*. This, on the other hand, may give Comfort and Joy to the sincere Servants of God. In that Day they will be own'd and acknowledg'd before Angels and Men. For 'tis Purity of Heart, Truth in the inward Parts, that in God's Account adds a Value to all our Religious Actions. The Holiness of your Aims, the Sanctity of your Intentions, is now hid from the World, and only known to God and your own Consciences: but in that important and awful Day you shall be publickly applauded and honour'd, and as the good and faithful Servants of God, shall be receiv'd into the Joy of your Lord.

F I N I S.



